DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 378 148 SP 035 666

AUTHOR Diez, Mary E.
TITLE The Portfolio: Sonnet, Mirror and Map.
PUB DATE 6 Oct 94
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Conference on Linking Liberal Arts and Teacher Education: Encouraging Reflection through Portfolios (San Diego, CA, October 6, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Higher Education; Individual Development; *Liberal Arts; Maps; *Portfolio Assessment; *Portfolios (Background Materials); *Preservice Teacher Education; Self Concept; *Self Evaluation (Individuals); Sonnets; *Student Development; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS Alverno College WI; Preservice Teachers; Reflection Process; *Reflective Awareness

ABSTRACT

The portfolio used in liberal arts teacher education encourages student reflection in three important ways symbolized by the sonnet form, by mirror, and by map. A sonnet must conform to a set of rules but the discipline of these rules offers a measure of freedom. In the same way, the work of portfolio development within established constraints provides a discipline and freedom of structure that allows the student to see his or her own work. Simply following the form of a portfolio does not ensure success, however. In particular, a showcase portfolio demands that all the samples selected must work together to communicate qualifications to a potential employer or evaluator. Developmental portfolios are like mirrors because they can allow the student to see their own progress. When students can see their own progress, it has a significant impact on their growth and self awareness. Looking at the reflection in a developmental portfolio can spark an internal reflection that provides a framework for looking at where next to set goals for progress, hence the map symbol for portfolio roles. Self assessment is the primary tool that makes the portfolio like a map. Using explicit criteria the student develops the ability to look at his or her own work and to determine strengths and weaknesses. The student then begins to set goals to address areas for development. The portfolio as map captures the sense of a process made a habit of mind, of a commitment to ongoing professional growth. (JB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 378 148

The Portfolio: Sonnet, Mirror and Map

Mary E. Diez, Ph.D.
Alverno College

Keynote Presentation
Linking Liberal Arts and Teacher Education:
Encouraging Reflection through Portfolios

October 6, 1994
Mission Valley Hilton
San Diego, California

Sponsored by
University of Redlands and
Rockefeller Brothers Fund

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M. E. Diez

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

SP035666

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The Portfolio: Sonnet, Mirror and Map

The portfolio offers encouragement for reflection in at least three ways. First, it provides both the discipline and the freedom of structure, allowing one to sees one's own work. Second, it provides the opportunity to assess one's own strengths and weaknesses through examination of a collection of sample, as well as to get feedback on one's performance from others. Third, the process of self assessment leads one to setting goals for future development and professional growth.

The Portfolio: Sonnet, Mirror and Map

I am pleased to be part of the University of Redlands and Rockefeller Brothers Fund Conference *Linking Liberal Arts and Teacher Education: Encouraging Reflection through Portfolios*. The tradition of liberal arts teacher education in the United States has many strengths; important among them is the practice of examining one's own practice and reflecting on one's own growth. I come to this talk as well with a special interest in the liberal arts, having served as a faculty member in English and communication before moving into the role of teacher educator.

As suggested by the title, this reflection on the use of portfolios will be divided into three parts, three angles for looking at the theme of encouraging reflection through portfolios: the sonnet, the mirror and the map.

Portfolio as Sonnet

Why choose the image of the sonnet for portfolio assessment? I'm sure most of us have at least a passing acquaintance with the form of the sonnet--14 lines of iambic pentameter, with variations of rhyme schemes and thought construction (the Petrarchan/Italian and the Elizabethan/ Shakespearean are the two most common types). But what does the sonnet have to do with portfolio?

I think the following sonnet about sonnets from William Wordsworth provides a clue. "Nuns Fret Not" is a poem I have used in an interdisciplinary course where students engaged in exploration of the relationships between form and meaning.

Nuns Fret Not

Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room;
And hermits are contented with their cells;
And students with their pensive citadels;
Maids at the wheel, the weaver at his loom,
Sit blithe and happy; bees that soar for bloom,
High as the highest Peak of Furness-fells,
Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells:
In truth the prison, unto which we doom
Ourselves, no prison is: and hence for me,
In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound
Within the sonnet's scanty plot of ground;
Pleased if some souls (for such there needs must be)
Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,
Should find brief solace there, as I have found.

William Wordsworth 1807

Wordsworth was one of several poets who used the medium of the sonnet to explore whether the sonnet (and by extension any particular form of poetry) was too rigid. His answer: *what constrains also frees*. The first part of the poem gathers examples of where an apparent limit is seen as providing benefit. Thus, the limits of the sonnet's "scanty plot of ground" challenge the poet to capture his or her idea in a specific shape. When it "works," the meaning and form together create exquisite beauty. Wordsworth does not address directly another question: Does following the form of the sonnet make a good poem? I'm sure he would not argue that the form,

in itself, assures a beautiful expression. Rather, the form provides a structure for the meaning to be expressed. And this is the point of my first analogy: the portfolio as sonnet.

The portfolio, like the sonnet, is simply a form, a structure. Provided one puts quality work between its covers, the portfolio can be a structure to help an individual express meaning. But its quality depends up what the individual does with it. Too often I hear teachers fall into the trap of expecting the *form* to do the work that only human discipline and creativity can do. I recall hearing one of the teachers in a summer workshop on portfolio assessment say to her group, "What if *it* doesn't work?" Portfolio assessment is not an *it,* with independent power. *We* have to make it work. The portfolio may provide a form, but the agency remains with the teacher's and student's *use* of the form. My argument is that form, whether for a poem or a portfolio, can be seen as a discipline that can be used to shape expression. It does not do the work of expression--that's the poet and the student's role.

The type of portfolio that the sonnet metaphor best describes is the *showcase* portfolio. A showcase portfolio puts together samples of one's work, with the purpose of, for example, showing the range of performance one has demonstrated, showing examples that meet a set of criteria for performance, or showing samples that one considers one's best efforts. It is usually created for a particular audience and purpose, as when an artist puts together a collection of samples to be considered for inclusion in a gallery exhibition. In the showcase portfolio, one's performance is focused outward, toward other persons, in the same way that literary works are written with a sense of the audience who will read them.

This external focus is one of the reasons why discipline is an issue with the showcase portfolio. In literature--whether sonnet or short story--all the parts must work together and have a relationship to the meaning that the author intends to be communicated to the reader. In the work

world, a similar discipline is required for communicating about one's qualifications to a potential employer. Anyone who has ever received a rambling resume for a job application knows why that's important. I remember receiving a resume from a person who was applying for the position of director of a tutoring center. The resume was several inches thick, with attachments that showed everything the person had ever done--most of it not related to the position in question. Moreover, some of it was trivial, giving impression person did not value depth. In short, no discipline had been used in culling and sorting the potential entries to address the position.

The focus on a specific audience and purpose also shape the requirements for kinds of samples one will choose to include; audience and purpose also determine the criteria for quality of such a portfolio. For example, the portfolio used as part of the process for admission to student teaching at Alverno College specifies a number of entries that are considered "evidence" for readiness for student teaching--a videotape of a lesson with children or young adults, an analysis of that lesson, a sample of one's subject area focus, a piece of reflective writing, a sample of instructional materials one has created. The criteria make explicit the need to see integration of theory and practice, application of instructional principles, and sensitivity to diversity.

The quality of such a showcase portfolio is dependent upon thoughtful determination of the entries, given the constraints of certain types of entries required. In that it is like the sonnet--drawing flexibility and creativity from discipline. Of course, the portfolio is less rigidly defined than the sonnet--ordinarily there are no restrictions on size, media, or presentation and it allows for a range of formats.

One final point about the showcase portfolio. This type of portfolio, more than others, can be a relatively "high stakes" process. Something important may hinge upon it--admission to student teaching, selection for an art show, a job. Again, there is parallel to the sonnet or any

literary work: is it good enough to publish?

I'd like to end this reflection on the portfolio as sonnet with another poem on the sonnet, this time from Keats, that says, in effect, let's take as much liberty as we need to in order to make the form serve its purpose. That's my advice, too, with respect to the portfolio.

On the Sonnet

If by dull rhymes our English must be chained.
And, like Andromeda, the sonnet sweet
Fettered, in spite of pained loveliness,
Let us find, if we must be constrained,
Sandals more interwoven and complete
To fit the naked foot of Poesy:
Let us inspect the lyre, and weigh the stress
Of every chord, and see what may be gained
By ear industrious, and attention meet;
Misers of sound and syllable, no less
Than Midas of his coinage, let us be
Jealous of dead leaves in the bay-wreath crown;
So, if we may not let the Muse be free,
She will be bound with garlands of her own.

John Keats 1819

The challenge for all of us engaged in the design of portfolio assessment is to assist our students to learn how to make their products more "interwoven and complete," weighing "the stress of every chord" to assure that the portfolio becomes an expression worthy of their--and our--

time and effort. While the external focus implied in the image of portfolio as sonnet is important, other uses of the portfolio are equally and perhaps more important in teaching and learning The functions that I call *mirror* and *map* will illustrate these approaches.

Portfolio as Mirror

The mirror is a more obvious metaphor and I'm using it fairly literally to ask the question *how can the portfolio assist one to see oneself?* If we think about the ways in which one can *see* one's development, there are other images that come to mind as well. For physical development, an analog of the mirror is the photograph--we can go back through a collection of photographs to see our movement from infant to toddler to child to adolescent and on into adulthood. And most of us probably had a wall or a door in our house as we were growing up where our parents noted the changes in our height from year to year.

With intellectual, cognitive, and educational development the picture of one's growth over time is less apparent, especially if all you have as a record of that growth are test scores or grades. For some 20 years, the faculty at Alverno have been working with this question of making student development visible and accessible to the student, through video portfolios, written portfolios, and multi media collections of work. We have discovered that there is a powerful impact on growth and self awareness when students can *see* their own development in speaking, in writing, in thinking and problem solving.

The ability to see development in these less visible areas requires clarity about what type of growth is important. Making clear what students need to know and be able to do, not only in a specific assignment or class, but across the experiences that lead to a college degree, is a necessary base. It requires clear criteria about what will *count* as meeting the goal that has been set. And it requires samples of performance over time so that learners and their teachers can look at how they

have grown and changed.

The *developmental* portfolio is the kind of portfolio I think of when I think of the portfolio as mirror. For example, when students look at their writing over time in relationship to the expectations for clear writing, they recognize the learning that has occurred and they consolidate that learning. Think of the possibilities for self awareness available implicit in a study of several drafts of the same paper or of several papers over the course of a class or a year. The impact of recognizing one's growth can also be present in the process of putting together showcase portfolio, when students review their work to choose the pieces they will include. As they complete their student teaching admission portfolios, our students often say "I didn't realize how much I had learned."

Because of its focus on development and progress, the developmental portfolio is relatively "low stakes." Students include more of a range of their work, showing the progress that they have made in a semester. They show the contrast between earlier drafts of a written work and the later, more polished, drafts. The goal is not selection of the best work, but a picture of the progress of learning.

The process of looking at one's development through a portfolio process functions like a literal mirror--when one see one's own image or performance--the *literal* reflection sparks *internal* reflection. If this is what my speaking looks like, what do I want to work on so that I can improve? What do I want to celebrate as something that shows me at my best? What provides a picture of where I have come through the learning process?

Portfolio as Map

That last set of questions leads to the final image: portfolio as map. Clearly the map image is linked to the mirror--focusing on what you see can spark the question about where you want to

go next. In the image of the map, a portfolio provides a framework for one to look at where next to set goals for one's own progress. The combination of samples of work and a sense of developmental criteria make the portfolio a tool to talk about growth and opportunities to develop further. Criteria for performance, such as the Alverno criteria for speaking across the curriculum guide the interaction between student and teacher.

Students often begin their work with speaking by writing out everything that want to say. While this may help organize their thoughts, it prevents them from fully engaging with the audience, because their eyes must follow the text or lose the flow of the words. Even if a student memorizes a written speech the barrier with the audience remains, for it's hard to break away from a prepared text to deal with the questions one sees in the eyes of listeners. If a speaker does break away, then there is the difficulty of getting back into the text.

The description of the speaking ability at Alverno incorporates a quality called *speaking on your feet.* The criteria for this quality ask students to work at developing ways other than written text to prepare a speech. Faculty assist students to develop skill with a technique called mapping, outlining the flow of one's plan for a speech, without writing out every word. The map of a speech allows the speaker to interact with the audience, adjusting to the need for more clarification or less. The spontaneous nature of the delivery of a speech from a map provides a more natural voice pattern as well.

Students begin their careers as Alverno students with a speech during the entry assessment process. Because this is the entry level, the criterion related to "speaking on your feet" requires only that "speak for *at least one minute* before an actual or imagined audience." In practice, the students speak before the camera person operating a video recorder. They view their speech during the first weeks of their first semester and get a sense of where they're starting from. As

they move through the curriculum, the criteria for this aspect of speaking become more demanding:

Level 2: "Speaks" on her feet (not reading or reciting) for a *recognizable portion* of the presentation

Level 3: "Speaks" on her feet for *most* of the presentation

Level 4: Gives the *consistent impression* of speaking *with* the audience

Criteria specify a total of ten areas of speaking that students work to develop across the curriculum, e.g., reaching audience through structure, reaching audience through support and development, reaching audience through media, and reading audience through appropriate content. Each have been spelled out in four developmental levels; the faculty have called these levels pedagogically developmental because they provide guidance to the student as they practice speaking about what they are learning.

At Alverno, our students' portfolios (e.g., the video portfolio for speaking, the writing portfolio, a collection of materials from the student's teacher preparation program) are made up of entries gathered from assignments and projects over time. The kind of work assigned thus makes a big difference. If students have only been asked to write in one mode or to one type of audience (or no audience except the implied teacher as audience), their portfolios will provide less opportunity to find direction. The role of the teacher in providing assignments that focus on the goals of the course and the program and projects that stretch the students' learning is critical.

Self assessment is the primary tool that makes the portfolio like a map. Using explicit criteria, the student develops the ability to look at her own work and determine the strengths and weaknesses evident in a particular performance or across a set of performances. She begins to set goals to address the areas she needs to develop and to deepen her areas of strength.

When made integral across the curriculum, the process of self-assessment and goal setting becomes an habitual practice. For example, Alvenro students create formal, showcase portfolios for admission to student teaching. But they do not see these portfolios as "completed." During student teaching, they update or change entries to keep up with their current growth. They then begin to use the portfolio as a framework for ongoing professional development planning--where do I want to develop next? And they begin to set their own criteria for the quality they seek.

The power of seeing the portfolio as map is to see that reflection can bring together the inner self and the outer world. The portfolio, as the theme of this conference suggests, encourages reflection--helping me to see my self and my strengths and weaknesses, but also to look at the sources for my growth in the larger world, especially the world of professional practice.

Reflection is not an automatic result of taking courses in the liberal arts. We need to teach the process of reflection, particularly the kinds of questions that spark reflection. At Alverno, we ask our students a number of question to guide the development of reflection: "What connections can I make between what I'm learning in one class with what I'm learning in another?" ""What questions do I have about my learning?" Of course, the initial response of many is that "I don't have any questions." But when they hear the questions of others, they begin to realize how they might look more deeply.

Students don't initially know what to do with a sample of their own performance, such as a speaking performance. So we use explicit criteria to teach the process of self assessment as a first step toward reflection. We also model the kinds of questions they can ask about performance: "What did I like best about this performance? What would I do differently if I could do it over or when I do it again?" Over time, students gradually take responsibility for their own reflection, using the criteria provided by faculty. But they also begin to add additional frameworks to guide

their reflection, drawing upon their developing philosophy of education. Ultimately, the highest "stakes" are those we set for ourselves. The portfolio as map captures the sense of a process made a habit of mind, of a commitment to ongoing professional growth.

Portfolio as Sonnet, Mirror, and Map

Just as Wordsworth and Keats questioned the sonnet and probed the ways it could capture the expression of the poet, we need to continue as educators to question the portfolio and probe its potential. My fear is that too much attention may be paid to the form of the portfolio, without sufficient care given to its power for learning. That power is unleashed when teachers see the portfolio process as dependent upon the clarity of goals for student performance through their work in the liberal arts and professional education curriculum; when they attend to the quality of the assignments, projects and assessments that they provide for their students; and when they take the responsibility for teaching students the process of reflection and self assessment.

Both the sonnet and the portfolio are, indeed, a "scanty plot of ground." It's what we do and how we use the portfolio that can make it a rich resource for reflection and growth.